

PEACEABLE OR PUSHY? CHRIST-LIKE CHARACTER CHECKLIST PART IV

James 3:13-18

Who is wise and has understanding among you? He should show his works by good conduct with wisdom's gentleness. ¹⁴ But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your heart, don't brag and deny the truth. ¹⁵ Such wisdom does not come from above but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. ¹⁶ For where envy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every kind of evil. ¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peace-loving, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, without favoritism and hypocrisy. ¹⁸ And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who cultivate peace.

INTRODUCTION

Our focus in **James 3:13-18** is upon character qualities that put our saving relationship with **Jesus Christ** on display. "Who is wise and has understanding among you?" James asks. "He should show his works by good conduct with wisdom's gentleness." The root meaning of the Greek word for "conduct" is "to turn back" or "to turn oneself around." This reveals how closely the Biblical concept of acceptable "conduct" is built upon the "about face" of repentance that God requires of us when He convicts us an action or attitude displeases Him. Thus, the "conduct" James refers to is "a lifestyle of demonstrated repentance." We prove **Jesus'** presence in our lives by showing how He's "turned us around" from living to please ourselves, as we did before **Jesus** claimed us, by living in an unselfish way that pleases the Lord. This is not easy, of course.

The *Peanuts* comic strip often showed Lucy and Charlie Brown practicing football. Lucy would hold the ball for Charlie's placekicking. He would approach the ball to kick it with all his might. Each time, Lucy would snatch the ball away just before he could kick it. Charlie's unchecked momentum would then cause him to fall flat on his back. A weekend comic strip opened with Lucy holding the ball but Charlie Brown refusing to kick it. No matter how much Lucy begs him, Charlie says he knows what she'll do to him if he tries. Lucy finally breaks down in tears and admits, "Charlie Brown I have been so terrible to you over the years, picking up the football like I have. But I've seen the error of my ways! Won't you give a poor penitent girl another chance?" Moved by her display of remorse, Charlie Brown tells her, "Of course, I'll give you another chance." He steps back while she holds the ball faithfully and then he runs up to kick it. At the last moment, Lucy moves the ball and Charlie Brown again falls flat on his back. Lucy's last words are, "Recognizing your faults and actually changing your ways are two different things, Charlie Brown!"

Three previous sermons on today's text described the Satanic Checklist James exposes in **vss. 13-16**. We've also considered two parts of the Christ-like Checklist James promotes in **vss. 13, 17-18**: Gentleness and Purity. We take a closer look today at Christ's character qualities of being Peace-Loving and Compliant.

II. A CHRIST-LIKE CHECKLIST (James 3:13, 17-18)

C. PEACE-LOVING

"Peace-loving" translates the adjective form of the main Greek word for "peace." "Peace," when referring to people, is understood in the New Testament as "right relationships between man and man" or "between us and God." We follow in the footsteps of the "Prince of Peace" (as Christ is called in **Isaiah 9:6**) when we base our conduct upon what will best secure peaceful relationships between others and with the Lord. In **Proverbs 6:16-19**, God concludes His list of the seven "things the LORD hates" and are "detestable" to Him by naming, "one who stirs up trouble among brothers." James identifies the "envy and selfish ambition" we allow to "exist" within our hearts as the root cause of such "trouble" ("strife"-NASB or "discord"-NKJV).

Pastor A. W. Tozer (1897-1963), in his best-known book, *The Pursuit of God*, describes the "faith" that is the primary action required of all who seek to be God's people as "a redirecting of our sight" that removes us from the center of our attention "and getting God into focus." To guard against the dangers of a prideful claim of being in tune with God despite an inability to live in harmony with others, especially within God's

family, Tozer asks, "Has it ever occurred to you that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same fork are automatically tuned to each other? They are of one accord by being tuned, not to each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow." Building upon Tozer's analogy, we could say if we often find ourselves in discord with others, especially within our church family, this testifies that we are not submitting ourselves to be "tuned" by the Lord in our private devotions and personal lives, as we claim.

We model Christ's "peace-loving" Spirit by cooperating with our Lord as He seeks to remove ideas or attitudes robbing us of the sweetness and power of living in peaceful harmony with our Savior. The Greek adjective translated "peace-loving" in **James 3:17** appears just one other place in the New Testament, in **Hebrews 12:11** (NLT), where it's translated "peaceful": "No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening — it's painful! But afterward there will be a *peaceful* harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way." "Discipline," in Greek, originally referred to the entire process of training and educating children, including improvement of their minds and morals. Children don't usually find such discipline "enjoyable," regardless of how good it is for them. Often, their first thought is their parents are mean, cranky, or unreasonable. This frustrates parents and their children. Sheri Mueller, of Lehi, UT, after a rough day spent corraling her rowdy kids, decided she'd had enough. "I think I'm going to sell them," she hissed to her sister. "You're crazy," said her sister. "For thinking of selling them?" "No; for thinking someone would buy them!"

About 15 years ago, Anthony Hebb lived as a young hoodlum on the streets of a city in Michigan. He writes, "When I was sentenced by the judge, for my crime, my reaction was not one of gratitude. But nearly 3 years removed from that day in court I can honestly say that the punishment the judge handed down to me became for my benefit, because of God's hand and love on me, His son. Many people who go to prison go back but that is because they continue to rely on their own abilities, to keep them from doing wrong. It is God who sustains my behavior. He keeps me on the straight and narrow."

Anthony Hebb is now a pastor. This illustration is from his own sermon on **Hebrews 12:11** and related verses: "No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening — it's painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way." Anthony Hebb now ministers to misguided youth on the same Michigan streets he once victimized. He cites **Hebrews 12:10**, "[O]ur earthly fathers disciplined us for a few years, doing the best they knew how. But God's discipline is always good for us, so that we might share in His holiness." Pastor Anthony says parents, "do their best, but being human, make mistakes, and maybe [don't] always [use] the right kind of discipline. But God's discipline is always good for us; God knows what each and every one of us need. . . . for us to draw nearer to Him." Pastor Anthony then tells of a young child who accidentally took sleeping pills from the family's medicine cabinet. Their Dr. instructed the parents to keep the child awake by any means necessary for the next four hours—including the pain of slapping if necessary." Inflicting such pain is not "enjoyable" for either parent or child. It's also not "enjoyable" to God or to us. But is such pain a blessing if it's necessary to keep us from being ruined by the destructive forces of sin or if it's necessary to keep us from disgracing our precious Savior's Name?

D. COMPLIANT

"[T]he wisdom from above is first pure, then peace-loving, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits." Because "compliant" forms a natural pairing with the character quality of being "peace-loving," we will take it up here and wait until next week to explore the pairing of "gentle" ("considerate," NIV; "fair-minded") and "full of mercy."

This is the only time the Greek word translated "compliant" appears in the New Testament. It can mean "ready to obey," in which case James would be urging us to be "ready to obey" God's will, regardless of our personal preferences or feelings. Years ago a university student heard his teacher read **Genesis 1** and highlight God's creative power of calling into being what did not previously exist, as when "God" merely "said, 'Let there be light' (vs. 3), 'Let the earth bring forth grass' (vs. 11), 'Let the waters bring forth abundantly (vs.

20); and 'Let us make man in our image' (vs. 26). The speaker then urged upon his hearers the wisdom and advantages if they would "let God" have His way in their lives. This young man went home with the words "let God" ringing in his ears. He carved them out in wooden letters, threaded them on a string, and hung them in his bedroom. But he wrestled with how could he "let God" have His way with him in everything. "What might this cost me?" he asked. One morning in desperation he banged his bathroom door as he went out and shouted, "I cannot let God." When he came back the "d" had come loose from the string, so the saying read, "Let Go." He immediately realized his difficulty that kept him from God's full blessings. He must "let go" of his desires to be in control of his destiny. Then he could "let God" have His way with him.

The Greek word translated "compliant" has a second meaning: "easy to persuade." This does not mean "easily gullible," but "teachable" (TPT), "reasonable" (NASB), or "approachable" (Phillips). It's the opposite trait of "being stubborn" or "close-minded." We embrace this character quality of our Savior by becoming "skilled in knowing when wisely to yield" to the insights and wishes of others. We demonstrate this quality when we cooperate as team players seeking to accomplish God's will in our homes, community, and church.

Charles Osgood is an American radio and television commentator. He turns 85 on January 8. The CBS Radio Network broadcast his daily program, *The Osgood File*, from 1971 until late in 2016. He tells of two ladies living in a convalescent center. Each had suffered an incapacitating stroke. Margaret's stroke left her left side restricted, while Ruth's stroke damaged her right side. Both ladies were accomplished pianists but had given up hope of ever playing again. The director of the convalescent center sat them down at a piano to encourage them to play pieces together. These professional soloists had to resist the urge to insist the other woman conform to her own playing standards and style, of which each considered herself an expert. They had to agree to play songs each enjoyed, rather than insisting upon their own favorites. They needed to restrain their pride in embellishing piano scores with soloistic flourishes in the interest of performing as a duet. They agreed to cooperate and a lovely friendship developed between them. These two ladies were soon able to play again at a level of competence and beauty neither dreamed possible. They modeled what is possible for a church to achieve through compliant cooperation. The great work no one member could do alone in service to the Lord, two or more members can accomplish when they strive to work together in harmony.

CONCLUSION

Bernie May is a former national Director of Wycliffe Bible Translators. One day he received an urgent call from Forrey Zander, director of Wycliffe's regional Chicago office. He excitedly told Bernie of a young woman named Thangi from Asia who'd just completed her Master's Degree in communications at Wheaton College. Her country no longer allows foreign missionaries and Thangi planned to return to her homeland in some mission's capacity. She'd contacted Forrey, who urged her to apply to Wycliffe's Summer Institute of Linguistics in Dallas to gain the ability to serve with Wycliffe. It was one week before the deadline. Thangi was still \$1,000 short. Forrey Zander called to ask Bernie if the money could be found for this crucial need.

Bernie shared the excitement over Wycliffe gaining a missions worker of Thangi's caliber. He believed he could shift budget priorities enough to come up with the needed money, but Bernie knew this meant he'd be the one making this happen. Praying silently for guidance, Bernie sensed God asking him to trust God to meet Thangi's need. He told Forrey, "If God wants her in this school this week, we can trust Him to locate and provide the funds." He promised he'd pray about Thangi's need and inform Forrey if anyone contacted him offering at least \$1,000 to train a national translator. Bernie writes, "I could hear the air escaping from Forrey's punctured balloon." Forrey Zander believed strongly God wanted this young woman to get training to serve with Wycliffe in a nation hard to reach with the Gospel. He had no desire to be "peace-loving" or "compliant" toward Bernie. He had every temptation to be pushy; to plead, argue, or shame Bernie into doing all he could to get "God's will" done. But Forrey understood what it means to trust in God's leading and provision rather than in what *we* can push through and make happen. He passed along Bernie's message to Thangi. She'd also learned the importance of living by faith and gave Bernie's plan enthusiastic approval.

The next day, Bernie May lunched with a wealthy man who could have easily written a check for the \$1000 Thangi needed. With his sales ability and marketing techniques learned in the business world, Bernie knew he could have succeeded in securing financing for Thangi's schooling. But God never prompted him to "sell" Thangi's need, so Bernie obediently remained silent about her, despite feeling guilty for doing so.

Two days later, he flew his plane from Oklahoma back to California. Storms along the southern route led him over Colorado. He knew friends from Dallas, TX, Henry and Marci Stuart, were probably vacationing at their cabin in Crested Butte. While he refueled, he gave them a call. Henry seemed delightfully surprised. He picked Bernie up at the airport and took him to his vacation home. Just as they sat down to tea, Henry said, "Bernie, I'm glad you stopped by. I've been thinking about the work carried on by Wycliffe Bible Translators. It seems you ought to try to find some Christian nationals and begin training them to help with the translation. If you ever find anyone like that, I'd like to invest one thousand dollars to help with their education." Bernie began to laugh while he told them about Thangi. They handed him a check for \$1,000!

"Who is wise and has understanding among you? He should show his works by good conduct with wisdom's gentleness. ¹⁴ But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your heart, don't brag and deny the truth. ¹⁵ Such wisdom does not come from above but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. ¹⁶ For where envy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every kind of evil. ¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peace-loving, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits." What sweetness and power of living in peaceful harmony with our Savior do we miss out upon by being self-driven or "pushy" in our homes, our community, or our church, rather than being the "peace-loving" and "compliant" believers who best model the character qualities of our Savior, **Jesus Christ**?